

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. Apparatus for facilitating communications
2 between a caller and a called party, the apparatus
3 comprising:
4 storage for storing a message for the called party
5 from the caller, and a telephone number for contacting the
6 caller;
7 a switch interface for causing an establishment of
8 a first connection to deliver the message therethrough to
9 the called party; and
10 a device for detecting a signal generated by the
11 called party, which indicates an initiation of a call to the
12 caller, the switch interface, in response to the detected
13 signal, causing an establishment of a second connection to
14 the telephone number, the first connection being bridged to
15 the second connection.
- 1 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the message
2 is recorded by the caller.
- 1 3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a message
2 identification is assigned to the message for association
3 with the telephone number.
- 1 4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the telephone
2 number is derived from an automatic number identifier (ANI).
- 1 5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the telephone
2 number is provided by the caller.

1 6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the signal
2 includes a DTMF signal.

1 7. The apparatus of claim 1 comprising a voice
2 response unit (VRU).

3 8. A messaging system comprising:
4 storage for storing a message for a called party
5 from a caller whose call to a called station associated with
6 the called party was previously unanswered, and a telephone
7 number for contacting the caller;

8 an interface for eliciting from the caller at
9 least one preference concerning delivery of the message;

10 a switch for establishing a first connection to
11 the called station to deliver therethrough the message in
12 accordance with the preference; and

13 a device for detecting a predetermined signal from
14 the called station, the switch, in response to the detected
15 predetermined signal, establishing a second connection to a
16 calling station associated with the stored telephone number,
17 the first connection being bridged to the second connection.

1 9. The system of claim 8 wherein the preference
2 includes a time range within which the message is delivered.

1 10. The system of claim 8 wherein the number of
2 attempts to deliver the message is not greater than a
3 predetermined maximum limit.

1 11. The system of claim 8 wherein the call was
2 unanswered due to a busy condition.

3 12. The system of claim 8 wherein the call was
4 unanswered due to a ring-no-answer condition.

1 13. The system of claim 8 wherein the call was
2 unanswered due to a communication problem.

1 14. The system of claim 8 wherein the telephone
2 number is derived from an ANI.

1 15. The system of claim 8 wherein the telephone
2 number is provided by the caller.

1 16. The system of claim 8 wherein the
2 predetermined signal includes a DTMF signal.

1 17. A communications system accessible by a
2 customer for obtaining information about a desired party,
3 the system comprising:

4 a server for providing a destination telephone
5 number for contacting the desired party;

6 a switch for establishing a first connection to a
7 destination station associated with the destination
8 telephone number;

9 a processor for monitoring signals on the first
10 connection;

11 an interface for prompting the customer to leave a
12 message when a signal from the first connection indicating
13 that the destination station is not answering is detected;

14 storage for storing the message and a calling
15 telephone number for contacting the customer, the switch
16 establishing a second connection to the destination station
17 to deliver the message therethrough; and

18 a device for detecting a predetermined signal from
19 the destination station, the switch, in response to the
20 detected predetermined signal, establishing a third
21 connection to a calling station associated with the calling
22 telephone number, the second connection being bridged to the
23 third connection.

1 18. The system of claim 17 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a busy signal.

1 19. The system of claim 17 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a signal indicative of a ring-no-answer
3 condition.

1 20. The system of claim 17 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a signal indicative of a communication
3 problem.

1 21. The system of claim 17 further comprising an
2 operator assisting the customer to obtain the information.

1 22. The system of claim 17 wherein the calling
2 telephone number is derived from an ANI.

1 23. The system of claim 17 wherein the calling
2 telephone number is provided by the caller.

1 24. The system of claim 17 wherein the
2 predetermined signal includes a DTMF signal.

1 25. A method for facilitating communications
2 between a caller and a called party, the method comprising:

1 storing a message for the called party from the
2 caller, and a telephone number for contacting the caller;
3 causing an establishment of a first connection to
4 deliver the message therethrough to the called party;
5 detecting a signal generated by the called party,
6 which indicates an initiation of a call to the caller;
7 in response to the detected signal, causing an
8 establishment of a second connection to the telephone
9 number; and
10 bridging the first connection to the second
11 connection.

1 26. The method of claim 25 wherein the message is
2 recorded by the caller.

1 27. The method of claim 25 further comprising
2 assigning a message identification to the message for
3 association with the telephone number.

1 28. The method of claim 25 wherein the telephone
2 number is derived from an ANI.

1 29. The method of claim 25 wherein the telephone
2 number is provided by the caller.

1 30. The method of claim 25 wherein the signal
2 includes a DTMF signal.

1 31. A method for use in a messaging system,
2 comprising:
3 storing a message for a called party from a caller
4 whose call to a called station associated with the called

5 party was previously unanswered, and a telephone number for
6 contacting the caller;

7 eliciting from the caller at least one preference
8 concerning delivery of the message;

9 establishing a first connection to the called
10 station to deliver therethrough the message in accordance
11 with the preference;

12 detecting a predetermined signal from the called
13 station;

14 in response to the detected predetermined signal,
15 establishing a second connection to a calling station
16 associated with the stored telephone number; and

17 bridging the first connection to the second
18 connection.

1 32. The method of claim 31 wherein the preference
2 includes a time range within which the message is delivered.

3 33. The method of claim 31 wherein the number of
4 attempts to deliver the message is not greater than a
5 predetermined maximum limit.

1 34. The method of claim 31 wherein the call was
2 unanswered due to a busy condition.

1 35. The method of claim 31 wherein the call was
2 unanswered due to a ring-no-answer condition.

1 36. The method of claim 31 wherein the call was
2 unanswered due to a communication problem.

1 37. The method of claim 31 wherein the telephone
2 number is derived from an ANI.

1 38. The method of claim 31 wherein the telephone
2 number is provided by the caller.

1 39. The method of claim 31 wherein the
2 predetermined signal includes a DTMF signal.

1 40. A method for use in a communications system
2 accessible by a customer for obtaining information about a
3 desired party, the method comprising:

4 providing a destination telephone number for
5 contacting the desired party;

6 establishing a first connection to a destination
7 station associated with the destination telephone number;

8 monitoring signals on the first connection;

9 prompting the customer to leave a message when a
10 signal from the first connection indicating that the
11 destination station is not answering is detected;

12 storing the message and a calling telephone number
13 for contacting the customer;

14 establishing a second connection to the
15 destination station to deliver the message therethrough;

16 detecting a predetermined signal from the
17 destination station;

18 in response to the detected predetermined signal,
19 establishing a third connection to a calling station

20 associated with the calling telephone number; and

21 bridging the second connection to the third
22 connection.

1 41. The method of claim 40 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a busy signal.

1 42. The method of claim 40 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a signal indicative of a ring-no-answer
3 condition.

1 43. The method of claim 40 wherein the monitored
2 signals include a signal indicative of a communication
3 problem.

1 44. The method of claim 40 further comprising
2 assisting the customer to obtain the information using an
3 operator.

1 45. The method of claim 40 wherein the calling
2 telephone number is derived from an ANI.

1 46. The method of claim 40 wherein the calling
2 telephone number is provided by the caller.

1 47. The method of claim 40 wherein the
2 predetermined signal includes a DTMF signal.